UCC Roots
Remembering our History

August 2021

"Black Leadership in the UCC"

Church leaders are shaped in memorable ways. Michael Collin Murphy (1952-2014) attended DePaul University, obtained a counseling degree at Michigan State University, and earned a Masters' degree and Doctorate from Chicago Theological Seminary. He was ordained in the African Methodist Episcopal Church in 1984, but in 1987 his ministerial journey and social justice work led him to establish a new church known as St. Stephens United Church of Christ in Lansing, Michigan—he served there for 21 years.

Murphy became involved in political issues in 1997 and was elected to the Lansing City Council several times. He was recognized for his work on safety issues for children, for solid fiscal leadership as a member of the Appropriations Committee, unmovable ethics, and an ability to work across party lines. He served as chairperson of the Michigan Legislative Black Caucus.

A Michigan colleague said,

> *"Mike was a driving force in the legislature. During our time together, he taught me the importance of empathy in leadership. His kind heart and determination to do good for citizens across the state set a standard for those around us. He always fought for what was right and not what was easy. This element of his legacy continues to reach far beyond the House chambers--successfully passed significant legislation on health care and worked tirelessly on behalf of the Black community."*

Local and national efforts within the United Church of Christ denomination encouraged involvement in protests, marches, and vigils against inequities in the US and abroad. Murphy eventually became the pastor of the UCC Peoples Congregational Church in Washington, DC. Murphy was also concerned about Ghana and helped to build a health clinic in Nsakye, Ghana, and support numerous Ghanaian students in enriching their education. He was honored as a tribal Chief and adopted Ghana as his African home.

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